



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBIDGE

Hansard 16 October 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Billie Watts; Dugongs

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (10.03 a.m.): I rise to pay tribute to a remarkable woman and tireless worker for the environment, especially Fraser Island. Billie Watts was known to many in this House through her involvement in the Fraser Island Defenders Organisation—an organisation whose efforts contributed to the cessation of sandmining and logging and subsequently to World Heritage listing.

Billie spent the early part of her life on Fraser Island. Her father was a surveyor with the forestry department. Lake Allom was named after him in recognition of his work. Those early years left a lasting impression on Billie and she went on to be a significant driving force in the preservation of this magnificent island. Billie Watts was a woman of great vision, boundless energy and amazing tenacity. In many ways she was a long way ahead of her time and took up issues with great passion. For many years she was active in the Queensland Conservation Council, the campaign against nuclear power, the peace movement, the women's movement, the Australian Labor Party and advancing Aboriginal rights and reconciliation.

Billie had the honour of being granted life membership of the ALP—an honour she did not seek, as she was not the sort of person who did things for accolades, but an honour that she richly deserved and which gave her great pride. Like many other members of our community, Billie was happy to work behind the scenes, but many of the things that she worked for would simply not have been possible without her tenacity, toil and vision. It was with great sadness that we learned of her passing. But, as anyone who was touched by her during her long and active life would agree, that sadness is offset by knowing that she truly did leave a lasting and worthy legacy.

I would like to briefly update the House on the dugong court case. Yesterday in The Cleveland Magistrate's Court fines of \$600 and \$400 were handed down to four people convicted under the Nature Conservation Act for unlawfully killing a protected marine animal.

Mr Schwarten: So they should. It should have been more.

Mr WELLS: I thank the minister. This follows the laying of charges by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in May last year, when it was reported that a dugong had been hunted and killed in Moreton Bay. It was argued by some that the defendants were exercising native title rights when this occurred. The court did not think so. None of those convicted yesterday were native title holders or claimants in Moreton Bay and did not have a right to hunt in the area.

The court's decision also confirms that these people did not ask for and could not have obtained permission from the Quandamooka people—the traditional owners of Moreton Bay—to take the dugong. Let me go further. There is no implied right in the Constitution to hunt a species to extinction, and there is no implied right in the Constitution to inflict cruelty on an animal. The courts have not gone this far yet, but some day they will. This successful prosecution sends a clear message to the community that we will not tolerate the unlawful killing of protected animals and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service will pursue anyone who breaks the law.